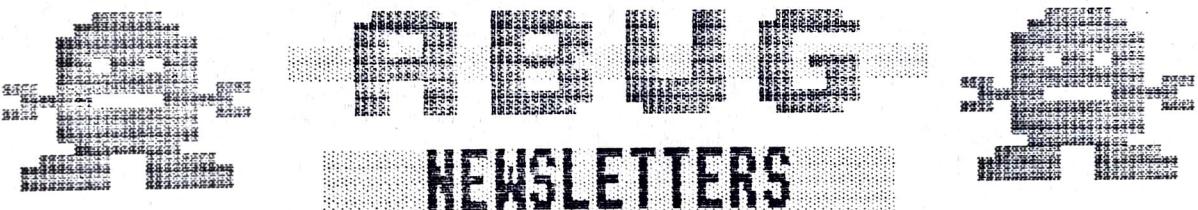
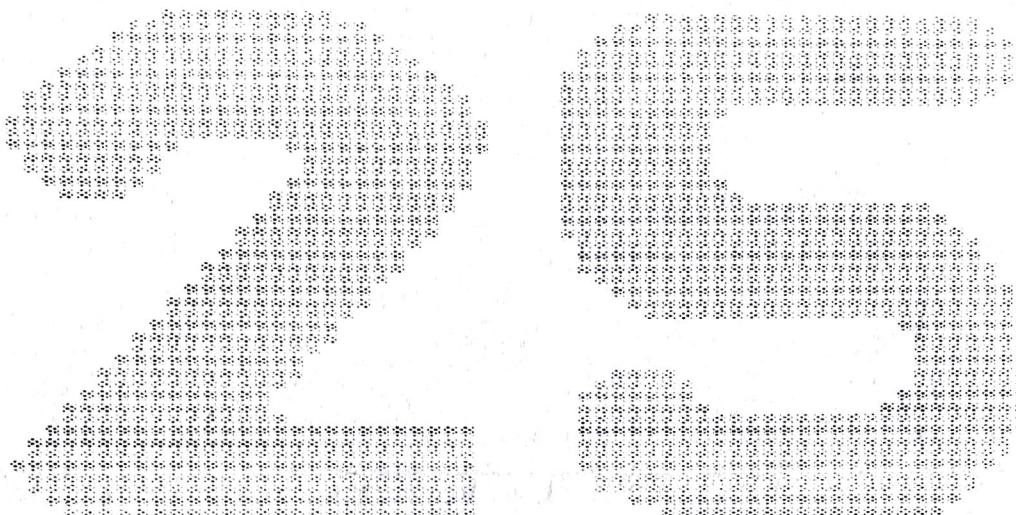


ABUG



ACORN & BBC
microcomputers
USER GROUP
Sheffield



NEWSLETTERS

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Diary

May 1st	(The Hornblower)	Social
May 15th	(Park Baths)	The Annual General Meeting
June 5th	(The Hornblower)	Social
June 17th	(Park Baths)	Open Forum Evening

Our thanks to Ben Newsam for stepping in at the very last moment (only two days notice), and giving a most instructive and interesting presentation of robotics. At present this is a use of the micro mainly confined to schools, but with the costs of such devices generally coming down, then more individuals are likely to become involved. This seems to be the pattern of development in the USA, and long been predicted for this country. Ben is obviously extremely knowledgeable and enthusiastic about this and related gadgets, and we hopefully will prevail upon him to talk again in the future.

As you will probably remember, the presentation for last time was supposed to be by Steve Gold, but, as was reported quite extensively in the local papers, he was arrested by Scotland Yard about a month ago and charged with offences concerned with Prestel fraud. This seems to be the first time anyone has been charged for offences of this type and it seems inevitable that it will be seen as a test case and become something of a cause celebre. In these circumstances we thought it would be better to postpone his visit until the affair had been resolved.

Although this case does not appear to involve direct breaches of copyright, it seems to fit in with the present attitude of the government that the time has come to crack down on all facets of computer crime. There is already a bill going through Parliament which will modify the Copyright Act to include computer software and this looks like reaching the statute books in late June or early July of this year. Although this is primarily aimed at the large scale copying perpetrated by the commercial pirates and educational institutions, computer clubs and even individuals will almost certainly be liable to scrutiny.

The latest series of television programmes on computers and education is being broadcast on Thursdays evenings (repeated on Sundays), and is aimed at teachers, parents and children.

Library Problems

As many people have commented, the Librarian has been notable by his absence for the last few months. All our efforts to resolve this situation have so far been unsuccessful but until we retrieve the remainder of the existing library stock we will shortly be restarting the library with new stock and the new Librarian to be elected at the A.G.M. Meanwhile, anyone who has any items out on loan, please could they now return them to John Bramwell or any other present committee member as soon as possible. At present we are considering the purchase of 'Diagram', one of a new generation of disc-based CAD programs which can be used to produce drawings, charts, timetables etc. One interesting feature of this package is that it comes in two versions, one to run directly from disc, and the other to run from sideways RAM (16K). The other facility

we need for the library is a stand-alone compiler which will translate normal Basic programs into machine code which will run on any machine. Several of these have been promised over the last eighteen months and two are now being advertised, from Computer Concepts and Pineapple Software. We hope to be able to evaluate the possibilities over the next few weeks but, meanwhile if anyone has any information on compilers or any suggestions for any other software or books which could usefully be purchased for the library, let us know.

Twin Disc-Controller Systems

We have reported several times over the last few months the limitations and problems of using the new double-density disc upgrades. The advantage of these is that they increase the capacity of any disc drive by 60-80% and because the alternative disc-controller chips which they use are more readily available, the upgrades are often cheaper. Problems have arisen because double density discs can not be read by single density systems and vice versa, and also because much of the latest disc-based software incorporates protection which involves direct accessing of the 8271. This means that protected software will not run on double density systems. The manufacturers have responded to these problems by writing their DFS's in such a way that all 8271 commands are intercepted and translated into the codes appropriate to the resident disc-controller. This has met with some success and the latest versions of the Watford, Solidisc and Opus double density upgrades will now run Elite for example. However, as disc protection methods get more sophisticated there will inevitably be an unacceptable time lag between the launch of new software and the DFS update to run it.

A hardware solution to the problem is being offered by at least two manufacturers: UDM and Solidisk. They both rely upon the use of a carrier board plugged into the disc controller socket on the Beeb. The carrier board then holds the 'normal' 8271 single density disc controller, and also provides double density facilities via a second disc controller, the 8272 with UDM and the 1770 with Solidisk. The use of differing disc controllers is going to provide compatibility problems of their own in the future, and really Acorn should have set the standard.

The switching between controllers is via a hardware switch, the location of which is unclear from the advertisements, but it is hopefully more convenient than under the Beeb lid. This arrangement appears to give the best of both worlds, but at some cost.

Anyone contemplating upgrading their Acorn disc system to double density needs to clearly decide what they are looking for from the change. The main evaluation must be based on the savings from disc purchases, and you need to be buying more than fifty discs before the upgrade becomes viable in this respect. A significant attraction of the combined systems is that it allows an initially cheaper access into a disc system, but with the later opportunity to upgrade to Acorn compatibility, but anyone thinking of taking this route should be aware that the 8271 controllers are still expensive and difficult to obtain, and likely to remain that way.

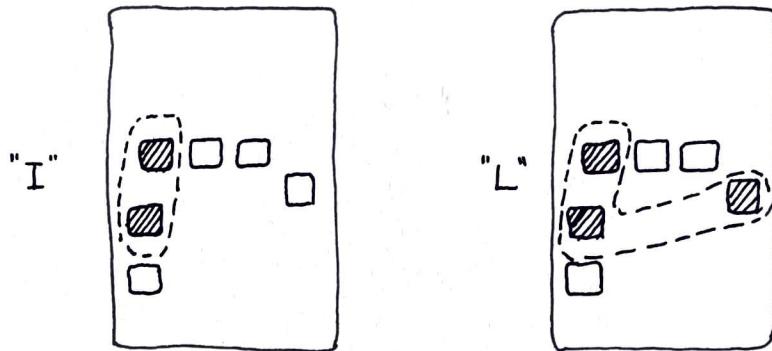
Quinkey Keyboard

" Learn to touch type in an hour " - " 14 days money back guarantee ", that's what the adverts say, so I bought one to have a play.

The QUINKEY keyboard consists of a plastic moulded case containing six keys and a lead that plugs into the analogue port on the BBC computer. The accompanying 32 page manual explains the various combinations of keys that must be pressed to obtain the ASCII character set.

At first sight the task of learning all the different key presses seems impossible, but it is this feature that makes the QUINKEY so powerful. As the manual explains, the

key combinations have been arranged such that there is an mnemonic relationship between the shape of the letter and the key presses required. The diagram below illustrates the idea.



Following the manual, I was indeed able to learn all the different key presses required in the first hour of use, though I could still write faster than type with the QUINKEY.

I have now used the QUINKEY for approximately 10 hours of continuous use and can touch type at about the same rate as I can handwrite, though with more mistakes.

The QUINKEY package comes with three pieces of software. 'WELCOME' allows you to practice with the QUINKEY should you not own a word processor, and 'WP' is a utility program for use with commercial word processors e.g. WORDWISE or VIEW. 'FROG' is another utility program which can be customized for inclusion in your own programs. I had no problems using these programs and in fact this article was written using the QUINKEY with WORDWISE-PLUS.

Finally, would I buy one? At £59.95, I think that the QUINKEY is grossly overpriced, although the actual keyboard is a good idea, if you fancy word processing whilst still being remote from the computer. Had the QUINKEY only cost between £20 and £30, I would probably have been tempted.

Phil Rubini

End of an Era

As no one can have failed to notice by now, the formal meeting for this month will include the A.G.M. As reported a couple of months ago an entire new committee needs to be elected if the club is to continue, and we would like to put out one final plea to anyone interested in participating to come along and offer their services. No particular skills are required, merely a willingness to put in a small amount of work each month to keep the club running. Unfortunately, because of the financial aspects of some of the club's activities it seems that all committee members should be at least eighteen years of age. We see no reason to impose an upper limit!

As this will be our last newsletter as editors, as well as being the 25th edition, we would like to thank all the contributors and readers over the last few years, and hope our successors find the task as rewarding as we have.

Agenda for The Annual General meeting

1. Introduction by the Chairman.
2. Treasurer's Report.
3. Election of the Committee.
4. Any other business.

Present committee posts:-

Chairman

Secretary

Treasurer

Editors (2 posts)

Events Organiser

Librarian

The meeting to be held on Wednesday, 15th May 1985 at 7.30 p.m., at the Park Baths Meeting Room. If time permits other additional activities are planned for the evening.